

Claims**1. A mail-processing machine comprising:**

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(a) an endless circulating, intermittently or continuously driven first conveyor;

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(b) a handling station positioned at the output side of said first conveyor; and

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(c) a first processing arrangement located in the vicinity of said handling station;

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(d) wherein said first conveyor has an upper reach defining a first conveyor path and forming intermittently or continuously conveyed transport sections for sheet like articles or sets thereof, said sheet like articles or sets thereof being placeable into said transport sections;

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(e) wherein said handling station comprises a manipulator hand having articulated thereto manipulator fingers; a manipulator drive, a base plate and an actuating arrangement for actuating said manipulator fingers;

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(f) wherein said manipulator hand is movable by said manipulator drive over said base plate in the direction perpendicular to the conveying direction of said first conveyor so that sheet like articles or sets thereof fed onto the base plate by said first conveyor, are moved by said manipulator fingers into said first processing arrangement, which is located along side the base plate; and

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- (g) wherein said manipulator fingers are raisable and lowerable, respectively, in relation to the base plate by said actuating arrangement;
- 5 (h) said manipulator fingers having pushing elements engagable with sheet like articles or sets thereof both in the pushing direction and the pulling direction;
- 10 (i) said actuating arrangement being selectably switchable such that said manipulator fingers
- 15 (i) either bear on the base plate during advancement of the manipulator hand and are raised off from the base plate during retraction of the manipulator hand;
- 20 (ii) or are raised off from the base plate during advancement of the manipulator hand and bear on the base plate during retraction of the manipulator hand; and
- (j) free through-passage-channel areas for movement of said sheet like articles or sets thereof being formed in regions above the level of the base plate of the handling station, not alone from the side of the circulating first conveyor and in direction to the first processing arrangement, but also to that side of the base plate which is opposite the side on which said first processing arrangement is positioned.
- 25 2. The mail-processing machine according to claim 1, wherein a further processing arrangement is located opposite the processing arrangement, which is located alongside the base plate, on the other side of the base plate.
- 30 3. The mail-processing machine according to claim 2, wherein at least one of the two mutually opposite processing arrangements, which are positioned adjacent to the base plate and sidewise perpendicularly to the conveying

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direction of the first conveying path, contains a second conveyer with a conveying direction perpendicular to the first-mentioned conveying path.

4. The mail-processing machine according to claim 3, wherein the conveying
5 direction of the or each arrangement containing said conveyer can be reversed by reversing the drive.
5. The mail-processing machine according to claim 1, wherein at least one of
10 the mutually opposite processing arrangements, which are positioned adjacent to the base plate and sidewise perpendicularly to the conveying direction of the first conveying path, is an operating station for providing open envelopes, in particular with an intermittently driven gripper-chain path, which, or each of which, interacts with the handling station as an inserter station for the sheet like articles or sets thereof which have been conveyed up
15 by the first conveying path.
6. The mail-processing machine according to claim 1, wherein the base plate
20 has slits passing through it, said slits extending in the conveying direction of the first conveying path serving for guiding therein conveying fingers of the first conveying chain or of an auxiliary conveying chain, said conveying fingers, when the manipulator fingers of the handling station have been raised, convey sheet like articles or sets thereof from the base plate to an additional processing arrangement, which adjoins the base plate on that side which is opposite the side from the first conveying path.
- 25 7. The mail-processing machine according to claim 6, wherein the additional processing arrangement contains an additional conveyor, in particular conveying chain.
- 30 8. The mail-processing machine according to claim 6, wherein the further processing arrangement contains a further processing station, in particular an inserter station.

9. The mail-processing machine according to claim 1, wherein at least one of its conveying chains has a continuously driven chain line and an intermittently driven chain line, the respective conveying fingers of the chain lines running on different tracks, such that the conveying fingers of the respective intermittently operated chain line, which are moved at a greater conveying speed in intermittent operation, receive sheet like articles or sets thereof from the conveying transport section of the continuously operated chain line.
10. The mail-processing machine according to claim 1, wherein the actuating arrangement contains guide follower means which are connected to a shaft mounting the manipulator fingers on the manipulator hand, and which make contact with a switch-over guide rail arrangement.
11. The mail-processing machine according to claim 1, wherein the manipulator drive of the handling station has a three-link mechanism, which comprises a framework-mounted actuating lever, which is driven to produce oscillating pivoting movements, a framework-mounted actuating link and the manipulator hand, whereby the actuating link is pivotably connected to one manipulator hand end and the manipulator fingers are articulated at the other manipulator hand end, while the actuating lever is articulated on the manipulator hand between the points of articulation of the latter for the actuating link and the manipulator fingers, and the three-link mechanism is dimensioned, and the points of articulation on the framework are selected in such way that, during a substantial part of the operating stroke and of the return stroke of the manipulator hand, the point of articulation of the manipulator fingers moves essentially parallel over the base plate.